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LiveWell Colorado Drives the Idea of Walking School Buses

*To promote health and a sense of community, help kids walk to school
with innovative idea*

August 27, 2009 – Denver, CO – LiveWell Colorado (<http://www.livewellcolorado.org>), a non-profit organization committed to reducing obesity in Colorado by inspiring healthy eating and active living, is encouraging families to use back-to-school as an ideal time to implement walking school buses. A walking school bus is simply a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a planned route with meeting points, a timetable and a schedule of parents or volunteers.

“Back-to-school is an excellent time of year to start new healthy habits,” said Maren Stewart, president and CEO of LiveWell Colorado. “A walking school bus is easy and fun. It doesn’t require money, it promotes a sense of community, and best of all, it allows parents the opportunity to spend quality time with their kids.”

LiveWell Northwest Aurora, a LiveWell Colorado community and a part of the Stapleton Foundation’s “Be Well” health and wellness initiative, is registering volunteers and kids for a walking school bus tonight, August 27, at Fletcher Elementary School’s Parent Coffee meeting.

“We were interested in the many benefits of this idea: bringing families together, fostering community interaction and introducing healthy exercise into our busy schedules,” added Alisha Brown of the Stapleton Foundation and LiveWell Northwest Aurora. “This parent-driven initiative stems from our local families’ desire for safe, healthy and active communities around their schools.”

LiveWell Northwest Aurora conducted extensive research on similar programs around the country, including in Columbia, Missouri. Visit <http://www.pednet.org/programs/safe-routes-to-school.asp> for more information on a successful model. In addition, Brown shared some considerations when beginning a formalized walking school bus program:

1. A consent form and insurance waiver are recommended so there is no liability for the walking bus driver.
2. Organizers must maintain good communication with parents.
3. Safety training should be held for walking school bus volunteers and kids.
4. Background checks are recommended (Since this can be expensive, LiveWell Northwest Aurora partnered with the local police department to have this done).
5. All volunteers must be required to follow all policies.
6. Organizers, partners and kids must consistently understand the importance of safety in the program.

Brown suggests partnering with community organizations to make the program safe and successful; LiveWell Northwest Aurora collaborates with many groups. The school district establishes traffic patterns, LiveWell Northwest Aurora will establish the walking paths once families register, and the police department offers safety training and background checks.

“We recommend making the program a safe and health-focused initiative that benefits the whole community,” added Brown.

Many communities (sponsored by LiveWell Colorado and others) around the state are implementing similar activities, including walking school buses and other walk-to-school incentives and programs. LiveWell Colorado encourages you to ask your local schools about participation. On a similar note, Colorado will participate in "Walk to School" in October 2009. Administrators, teachers and parents can learn more at www.walktoschool.org.

About LiveWell Colorado

LiveWell Colorado aims to provide every Coloradoan with access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity in the places they live, work, learn and play. This non-profit organization will realize its vision by elevating health and wellness awareness, augmenting funding for the most promising obesity reduction strategies and leveraging investments and resources. With the launch of Colorado’s strategic plan, Fostering Healthy People and Places: The Power of All of Us, LiveWell Colorado and its board of directors will implement an aggressive, coordinated statewide intervention to address the human and economic tolls of overweight and obesity and improve the health and well being of all Coloradoans. For more information about LiveWell Colorado, visit www.livewellcolorado.org.

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